

about pushing around a growling, throbbing upright) horny too.

They stripped down right there in the living room, and to add a little spice — the danger of being caught in the act — they coupled up on the sofa, were clawing and writhing in each others clutches when the danger factor proved true: Mom, home early because her usual girl Sabrina had gone home sick, standing rigid in front of the china cabinet, her old craggy face distorted into a grimace of horror. "OH JESUS FUCKING CHRIST!" Glenda screamed, as she kicked a still unejaculated Bob up off her, over the arm of the sofa and into a flying collision with the wall. The picture of the kids — the boy in a stiff shirt and bow-tie, the girl in frills, a pink ribbon in her hair — jumped away from its stud-sunk nail and bounced on the rug, and Mom wailed (a phlegmy, guttural noise coming from deep in the belly) into the kitchen and pulled the cutlery drawer out of the cabinet and spilled its contents on the floor. Then from the mish-mash of utensils on the linoleum, she made her choice.

Bob was attempting — in a blind panic; Mom had a history of psychotic episodes (and dirty, filthy sex was one of their triggers) that featured murderous intentions — to jump into his trousers two legs at a time when his mother-in-law emerged from the kitchen brandishing, in his direction, a long-pronged meat fork. Bob tugged the pants up and discovered he'd situated them backwards. His scared flaccid penis flopped atop his belt loop as he hopped backwards and into the wall, and Mom — her head gyroscoping atop her thin neck, her eyes bulging with her schizophrenic perspective — screamed loud and shrill, lunged forward and planted the prongs of her fork deep in her son-in-law's heart.

WITH EVERY BEAT OF HIS HEART

Ellis Leahy, tuba in tow, was the first member of the Loma Alta Brass Band to show up for practice at Bob Urp's place, and it was apparent right away that the blowing session would not be. A shriek through the screen door announced: "OH MY GOD, SHE'S KILLED HIM!" Ellis dropped his tuba and blasted into the house and found Saxophone Bob Urp laid out on the living room floor, a meat fork buried in the center of his chest, the black wooden handle pointing at heaven, hopping, quivering in a gelatinous dance with every beat of Bob's heart.

Glenda Urp screamed wordlessly at the hideous scene, huddled back into the corner of the room, then she lunged at the fork with the intention of extracting it from her husband's chest. Ellis body-blocked her, pushed her back into the wall and said, "Leave it be; you pull it outa there, he'll

bleed to death." Glenda grabbed her hair and slid down the wall to the floor.

Out in the kitchen Glenda's Mom, Meat Fork Ellie, stripped herself naked and growled like a feral cat, then she tugged everything out of the refrigerator, shelves included, and climbed inside, curling herself up in a fetal ball as the white door thumped shut on its gentle magnets. Ellis called 911, then he hunkered down next to Bob and told his still conscious friend that everything was going to be O.K.

Meat Fork Ellie, breathing the increasingly stagnant air, passed out, then slumped against the door, pushing it open, falling out and into the shards of broken glass and smeared mayonaise and the scattered pickles. She rode the same ambulance as her son-in-law, with a different destination.

The surgeons removed the fork, closed up the two holes, pulled him — after a week of tense touch-and-go — through. A month after he was released from the hospital, sporting a centipede scar on his sternum, two fang-like holes over his heart, his mother-in-law (judged insane) was released also, in a state of zombie numbness from the prescribed pharmacological stew that altered every neurochemical transaction in her brain.

SEARCHING FOR HEAVEN

Institutionalization was an option, but then that would eat up the nest egg — that quarter million Mom had banked from the old man's life insurance and the sale of her old tract home. So the Urps, Bob and Glenda, relied on the medication that made a zombie out of Mom, to keep the old girl manageable. And Bob kept track of all the sharp objects, cut Mom's meat in the kitchen, locked up all the cutlery in a took box under the sink when he was done

"I think," Glenda said to Bob after he'd sneaked in through the back door from the alley to avoid Mom's customary glassy-eyed front porch sentry, "that Mom has gone off her medication." "Why," Bob replied, setting his lunch pail down on the drain board, "do you say that?" "She's been acting sort of weird," said Glenda, casting a nervous glance in the direction of the front yard. "You give her the pills; how the hell would she go off her medication?" Glenda crossed her arms, scowled, said, "I think she slips them under her tongue, then spits them out when we're not looking. I don't think she likes what they do to her; she's desperate to be normal." "Maybe," Bob replied, scratching his jaw and following his wife's gaze in the direction of the front yard. "We'll have to start force-